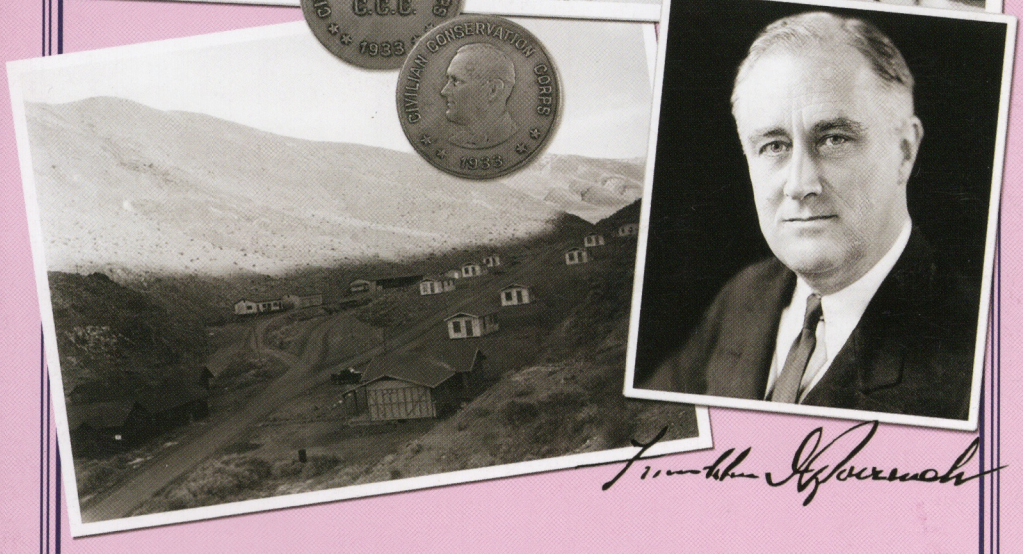
DEATH VALLEY '49ERS
53
KEEPSAKE

THE STORY OF THE

# CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

IN DEATH VALLEY




by Letha and Ted Tatro

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† Died during term in office

KEEPSAKE No. 53

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# THE STORY OF THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN DEATH VALLEY

by Letha and Ted Tatro

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# *The President's Greetings*

I welcome the opportunity to extend a greeting to the men who constitute the Civilian Conservation Corps. It is my belief that what is being accomplished will conserve our national resources, create future national wealth and prove of moral and spiritual value, not only to those of you who are taking part, but to the rest of the country as well.

You young men who are enrolled in this work are to be congratulated. It is my honest conviction that what you are doing in the way of constructive service will bring you, personally and individually, returns the value of which it is difficult to estimate.

Physically fit, as demonstrated by the examinations you took before entering the camps, the clean life and hard work in which you are engaged cannot fail to help your physical condition and you should emerge from this experience, strong and rugged and ready for re-entrance into the ranks of industry, better equipped than before.

I want to congratulate you on the opportunity you have, and to extend to you my appreciation for the hearty cooperation which you have given this movement, so vital a step in the nation's fight against depression, and to wish you a pleasant, wholesome and constructive stay in the CCC.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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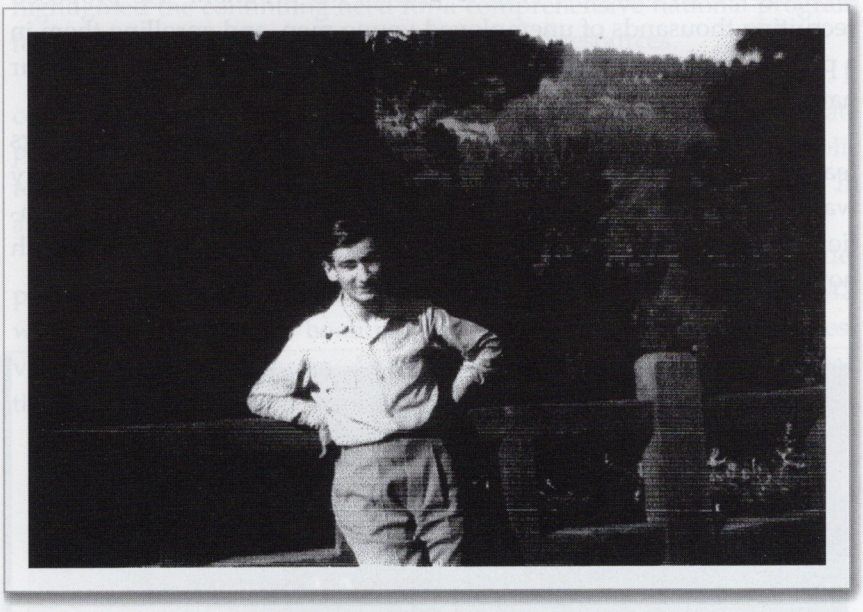
Franklin D. Roosevelt

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this Keepsake to the memory of my brother, James Venus Tatro, who served in the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939 and 1940. Although he did not serve in Death Valley, he did serve in Pelsor, Arkansas. All camps had basically the same mission–to help with the conservation of state and federal lands under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

Ted Tatro



James Venus Tatro

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CCC

The 1932 Presidential election was a desperate cry for help from America. A major concern was the massive unemployment of young men in large urban areas. During what would later be called "The Hundred Days," newly elected President Roosevelt instituted the Emergency Conservation Work Act (EWC) as part of "The New Deal" for America. This program brought together two resources, our unemployed young men and our neglected public lands, and became known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

The President wasted no time. He called for an immediate session of Congress on March 9, 1933 to present his program. He proposed recruiting thousands of unemployed young men, and enrolling them in a peacetime army to do battle against the destruction and erosion of our natural resources.

At first, the labor unions opposed the CCC program. Labor leaders feared that the program would cost union jobs and because the Army was involved, it was feared that the program might lead to regimentation of labor. In spite of objections, the CCC program passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law March 31, 1933.

Enrollees at work building new roads.

In the beginning, the program was run by regular and reserve officers from all branches of the military. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior were responsible for the planning and organizing of work in every state in the union. The Department of Labor helped with the selection and enrollment of young men through state and local relief offices. Veterans and Native Americans were included in the CCC program.

Each man was paid $25 a month for his labor of which $20.00 went to his family while he kept $5.00 for himself. Other benefits included: improved physical condition, a sense of self-worth, and increased employability. The CCC promoted a heightened public awareness and appreciation of the outdoors and the nation's natural resources. It also highlighted the continuing need for a comprehensive national program for the protection and development of natural resources.

The CCC planted nearly 3 billion trees to help reforest America. It constructed more than 800 parks nationwide and revitalized most state parks. The CCC also built a network of service buildings and public roadways in remote areas, many of which are still in service today. In addition, the CCC updated forest fire fighting methods.

The CCC was never intended to be a permanent agency. It depended on temporary, emergency funding for its existence. In 1942, with the war industries booming and the draft in operation, Congress voted to close the program. As the most popular part of the New Deal, the CCC employed more than three million men before its end.

## IN THE BEGINNING

In 1933 Death Valley became a National Monument. After an aerial survey by the Superintendent of Sequoia National Park/ Administrator of Death Valley with the commanding officer of the March Field CCC District, it was decided that two CCC camps should be considered for Death Valley.

Death Valley's first CCC Company was scheduled to come from Sequoia National Park; however, the Director of the Park Service felt that this would unfairly take away needed help from another part of the National Park System. The decision was made to use men from the Forest Service, and two companies from San Bernardino National Forest.

Death Valley National Monument ultimately housed 12 CCC Companies each consisting of 200 men located at Camps Wildrose, Funeral Range, and Cow Creek over the next nine years.

The first enrollees came from Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio and later from New York and New Jersey. These young men became very homesick. Beginning in 1935 only California companies were used, hoping that if the enrollees were closer to home they would be more committed to the job.

An early CCC camp in Death Valley.

The many CCC construction projects in Death Valley made it accessible and attractive to the visiting public. Their work is visible today in the campgrounds, roads and buildings that are still in use. It is sincerely hoped that all visitors to the locations where the CCC Companies worked will gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the significant legacy that has been left by these hard working young men.

Barracks

Bunk bed and foot locker.

## COW CREEK AND FUNERAL RANGE CAMPS

During 1933 the enrollees built identical camps known as Camp Cow Creek and Camp Funeral Range. The "corporation yard" contained a service garage, radio shack, blacksmith shop, wash rack, and a power plant which was shared by both camps. This site is now called the Cow Creek Maintenance area.

Maintenance yard at Cow Creek

In 1936 a fire destroyed all but two of the original wooden buildings in Camp Cow Creek. The infirmary and the officers' quarters/recreation hall were all that remained. After the fire, the two camps were integrated into one. A "fire reservoir" was constructed for fire protection and water supply. It was also enjoyed by the enrollees as a swimming pool.

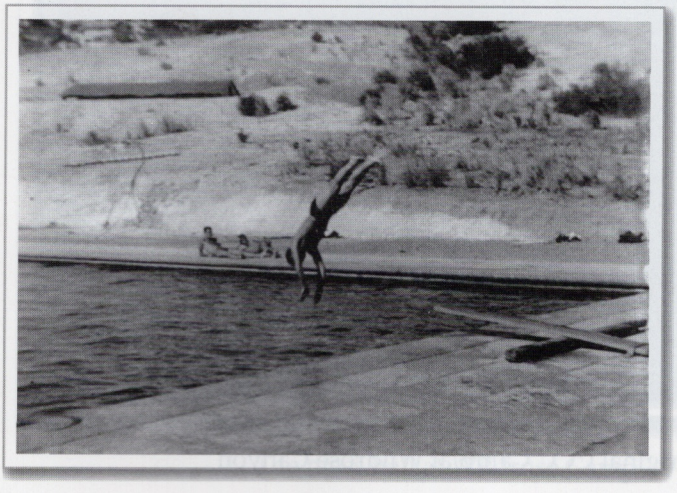
The CCC also erected new adobe buildings which were used by the National Park Service for operations management, radio facilities, and housing. A plant nursery was constructed in the hills above Cow Creek near the location of the park's current housing area.

A number of these CCC era structures are being used today such as: the adobe entrance sign, the swimming pool, warehouses, a carpen-

ter shop, trades shop, adobe workshop, and radio building. The original stone steps and walkways are also still in use. Today, the Resources Management Division Office continues to use the original monument's headquarters building.

Handmade adobe bricks are stacked and ready for use at the Cow Creek Brick yard.

After the Cow Creek fire in 1936 a "fire reservoir" was constructed to provide an on-site water supply.



The fire reservoir was often used by Enrollees as a swimming pool.

## WILDROSE CAMP

In the 1870's the Modock Consolidated Mining Company built charcoal kilns in Wildrose Canyon. The charcoal produced by the kilns was used as fuel for two silver-lead smelters located about 25 miles away in the Argus Range west of Panamint Valley. The Wildrose kilns employed about 40 woodcutters and the town of Wild Rose was established becoming the home to about 100 people. The kilns operated until the summer of 1878 and then closed due to the deteriorating ore quality.

In 1935 a decision was made to establish a third CCC Camp away from the extreme heat of the valley floor. Should they continue their work in the Panamint Mountain Range at Wildrose Canyon, or move to Beatty, Nevada where they could carry out their work in the Daylight Pass, Chloride Cliff, and the Titus Canyon areas?

Because of the infrastructure already established at Wildrose, it became the third camp. This allowed the CCC to work year-round in Death Valley.

Original CCC Camp at Wildrose Canyon

In 1939 the unsatisfactory tents were replaced with a new permanent camp. This included barracks, a mess hall/kitchen, an infirmary, a recreation hall, an administration/supply building, a shower house, a laundry, and a sports field. As part of the new construction, they also improved the road to the top of the divide. On nearby Pinon Mesa, a beautiful summer residence was constructed for the monument's superintendent.

The workshop and generator buildings remain along with three former residences which are being used today by the National Park Service. All other buildings were removed in 1942 after the CCC program ended.

The mess hall at Wildrose Camp

## TEXAS SPRING CAMPGROUND

In 1934 and 1935 the CCC developed the roads and parking area which we know as Texas Spring Campground. In addition, they enlarged the upper loop and added seven stone picnic tables and benches which are still in use.

Texas Spring Campground is very popular not only with '49ers who stay there during Encampment, but with visitors from all over who enjoy the quiet and the dramatic views. Additional areas have been added to accommodate large camping groups.

Construction of the Texas Spring Comfort Station.

## IN CONCLUSION

From the time Death Valley was established as a national monument in 1933 until 1942 when the CCC men were called for the war effort, twelve CCC companies worked in Death Valley. During this time they:

- Laid over 500 miles of roadways
- Piped in a fresh water system
- Installed telephone poles and lines in Death Valley
- Built a total of 76 buildings for the WPA and National Park Service employees
- Dug trails to points of scenic interest in the Panamint Mountains
- Assisted in the construction of 12 adobe structures, a laundry and a trading post for the local Timbisha Shoshone Tribe
- Created five campgrounds, restrooms and picnic facilities
- Developed wells and springs
- Constructed an airplane landing field
- Made signs
- Helped with surveying the valley

Their legacy lives on as many of these buildings and areas are still in use today.

Adobe structure built for the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe at Furnace Creek.

## TED REMEMBERS

My mother and dad owned a hotel – nowadays you probably would refer to it as a Bed and Breakfast.

We lived six miles from this CCC Camp and on the other side of town it was eleven miles to another CCC Camp – in other words there were CCC Camps all around where we lived. These CCC Camps helped to improve our economy as the allotments to the parents helped with the flow of money.

The wives of the commanding officers at the Camp were not allowed to stay at the Camp so my mother invited them to live at our hotel and to work for part of their room and board.

My brother did not like school and several friends of his went into the CCC so he pleaded with my parents to let him quit school and volunteer in the local CCC Camp. The commander of the Camp was at the hotel and heard the conversation and he said that even though my brother was only 16 years old he would see that my brother could join.

James had many stories to tell about living there beginning with the food, work and living conditions. He said that the food was good but "not as good as what my mother fixed." The only problem was that the tables were placed from the center of the mess hall out to the walls – thus when the food was placed on the tables at the center, the bigger and older guys would take large amounts and when the serving dishes got to him there was nothing left to eat. He had to wait for the guys in the middle to eat their fill before the serving plates were passed on down the table.

James started out working the maintenance yard washing trucks and equipment. He learned to drive heavy equipment while working in this yard. There were many opportunities to learn various trades while working there such as, carpentry, electrical, brick laying, cooking, office work, and much more. They had to show interest in something special and then push to get into that trade. James chose to get into the motor pool where he learned mechanic work and welding. This all helped him in later life.

The working days went fine BUT after work—your time was your own unless you did KP, got involved in sports and/or entered into games in the recreation hall. Two nights each week the Camp provided movies and sometimes there was entertainment brought in from the

local communities. There were also educational opportunities as many had not finished high school. When taps came–it was lights out and in the darkness and quiet of the night while lying in your bunk you could hear homesick sounds. When morning came–no one mentioned anything about it.

When my brother, James, joined the CCC, he was 16 years old and I was 8. To this day, whatever was good for him was good for me – he was my mentor.

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## PHOTO CREDITS

James Venus Tatro photo courtesy of Ted Tatro

Cover and interior photos courtesy of Death Valley National Park. Copies provided by Greg Cox, Death Valley Museum Curator.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Judy Hartmann for her time and hard work proof reading, editing and typing this publication.

Rick Hartmann and K. Ballard for their many hours proof reading.

We truly appreciate all their time and work.

## OUR 2013 PRESIDENT
## LETHA B. TATRO

Letha met Ted at a Shrine event in 1986. They worked together in many Shrine groups and events which included the Shrine Annual Holiday Party where Letha helped Ted with the chairmanship.

They married and are now enjoying their home in the Sierra Mountains at 4,000 feet where they get plenty of snow.

Letha and Ted are very active in their church, where they serve as officers. They are also very active in the local Volunteer Fire Department where Letha served as President of the Fire Auxiliary. She was also elected to a 4-year term on the Fire Department Board of Directors and served two years as its President. She also chaired the County Fire Department Chili Cook-off for eight years and served as Vice President of the County Fire Council.

Letha and Ted enjoy traveling with their RV, have attended 25 Encampments and enjoy being involved with the Death Valley '49ers. They have participated in many events including selling memberships, chairing the Pampered Pet Parade, co-chairing Gold Panning and helping out wherever they are needed.

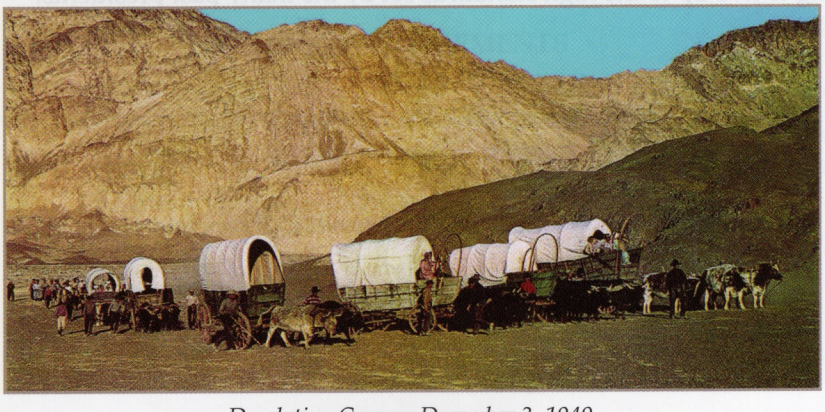
Before becoming President of the Death Valley '49ers, Letha served as Secretary for two years, and Second and First Vice President. She thanks everyone for electing her to the position of President and is trying to live up to the high standards set by the many past presidents.

# DEATH VALLEY '49ERS, HOW IT ALL BEGAN

It was Saturday evening December 3, 1949 in Desolation Canyon, Death Valley, California. The sun had disappeared behind the Panamint Range. It its wake a web of rays tipped the Funeral Range to the east and lighted a smoky haze of dust that hung above the canyon. Under the cloud people moved, thousands of them. They poured from the scene of the California Centennial Pageant to a sea of automobiles that spread across the desert floor from the canyon's mouth. A flood of humanity estimated at over 60,000 had come to Death Valley from all parts of the country. They camped on the desert, they camped in the folds of the canyon, they slept in their cars, trailers, wagons, tents, in blankets laid on the hard earth, their tiny fires flickered all through the night as far as the eye could see.

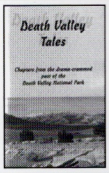
The fantastic success of the pageant had evolved from a lot of planning and doing since a Saturday luncheon in November 1948 at Ridgecrest, California. On that occasion delegates representing the counties of Inyo, San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Kern counties met to ponder how they would observe California's statehood. The decision was to hold a pageant in Death Valley to also commemorate the 1849 wagon train. The first thing they did was to organize under the banner of Death Valley '49ers, Inc. The success of the event exceeded every ones expectations. During the wrap up meeting a delegate remarked that the response had been so natural and enthusiastic as to warrant continuance of the organization. In 1950 a meeting was held in Death Valley to continue the event that has become the Encampment.

This year we celebrate the 63rd Encampment. Since the beginning in 1949 the Encampment has becomes a major event featuring one of the oldest art shows in the west and with outstanding western musical entertainment. The continuation of the Encampment depends on your support, join the '49ers. The future depends on your support.



*Desolation Canyon December 3, 1949*

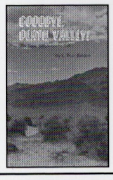
# Death Valley '49ers Books




**Death Valley Tales, chapters from the drama-crammed past of the Death Valley National Park**
by Ten Western Authors Death Valley '49ers publication #03 74 pages in Soft Cover

This publication has been in print since 1955, but in this newly updated edition all stories are true.

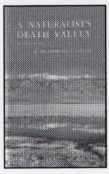
Mrs. Juliette Brier's account of her trek through the desert in 1849-50 and Russ Journigan's remembrances from the 1930's and 1940's are a wonderful addition, along with John Rogers Death Valley's Unsung Hero in 1849.




**Goodbye, Death Valley! The Tragic 1849 Jayhawker Trek** by L. Burr Belden
Death Valley '49ers publication #04 68 pages in Soft Cover

This work traces the largest of several parties who became mired in Death Valley during December 1849. Two members of this party, Jayhawkers, kept diaries of their trip which have been preserved.

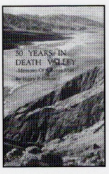
They were consulted by the author along with a scrapbook and numerous letters kept by the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. This work also includes a list of Jayhawkers.




**A Naturalist's Death Valley** by Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger
Death Valley '49ers publication #05 76 pages in Soft Cover

A Naturalist's Death Valley is a primer to help the thousands of admiring visitors to Death Valley National Park get a general picture of its wild flowers, trees, shrubs, reptiles, birds, insects, mammals, fossils and Native Americans.

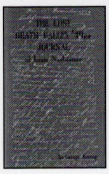
Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger was a nationally known naturalist who authored many book on the flora & fauna of California.




**50 Years In Death Valley, Memoirs of a Borax Man** by Harry P. Gower
Death Valley '49ers publication #09 164 pages in Soft Cover

"A collection of reminiscence and anecdotes of the Death Valley area between 1909 and 1960. Mr. H. P. (Harry) Gower was not only a resident but had a major influence on the course of events in the region during those years." - Dean Lemon, Life Director, The Death Valley '49ers

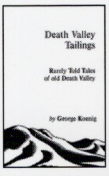
"Harry P. Gower was not just a spectator but often a prime mover in events in Death Valley. Surveying for railroads, routing claim jumpers, and managing a pioneer resort hotel." - L. Burr Belden, Past President, The Death Valley '49ers



**The Lost Death Valley '49er Journal of Louis Nusbaumer** by George Koenig
Death Valley '49ers publication #11 84 pages in Soft Cover

Louis Nusbaumer (1819-1878), was a German immigrant who left New York City in March, 1849, traveled to Independence, Mo., and there began his trip overland with William Lewis Manly and John Rogers to California.

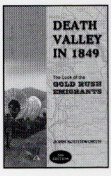
This is the story of his journey, which was kept in tow small notebooks, recovered in 1966, illustrated throughout with drawings, photos and maps. Made available here by the Death Valley '49ers organization.




**Death Valley Tailings: Rarely Told Stories of old Death Valley** by George Koenig
Death Valley '49ers publication #13 132 pages in Soft Cover & 144 pages First Edition Hard Cover

Recaptured within these pages are the stories that will help you to turn back the clock and relive the historic past. This definitely is a different collection of Death Valley tales. Each provides a more complete picture of one of the most fascinating area and eras of the Old West.

Subjects discussed include missing 1849 Death Valley Argonauts, gold and silver hunters, explorers, map makers, and inscriptions left on rock.




**Death Valley in 1849: The Luck of the Gold Rush Emigrants** (5th Edition) by John Southworth
Death Valley '49ers publication #14 132 pages in Soft Cover

This publication is a total rewrite of the best of the four previous editions plus many new developments. It is also the first and only available source which details all three escape routes taken by those hundred lost, hungry and thirsty souls who wandered into Death Valley's salty depths many years before that valley even had a name.
Stopped by the impassable eastern escarpment of Telescope Peak and faced by ultimate starvation if they didn't move on, those lost Gold Rush pioneers split into three groups.
It's all here, spelled out for you. Enjoy!

Orders may be placed by visiting our website at
www.DeathValley49ers.org

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